

IN THE CLAIMS:

*Kindly rewrite Claims 1-9 and add claims 10-18 as follows, in accordance with
37 C.F.R. § 1.121:*

1. (Withdrawn) An isolated and purified DNA encoding a protein selected from the group consisting of:

(A) a protein which has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2;

(B) a variant of a protein which has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 comprising substitution, deletion, insertion or addition of one or several amino acid residues and has an activity for producing a polysaccharide;

(C) a protein which has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 4; and

(D) a variant of a protein which has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 4 comprising substitution, deletion, insertion or addition of one or several amino acid residues and has an activity for producing a polysaccharide.

2. (Withdrawn) The DNA according to claim 1, wherein said DNA is selected from the group consisting of:

(a) a DNA which has the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1;

(b) a DNA which is hybridizable with a DNA having the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1 or a probe that can be produced from said nucleotide sequence under stringent conditions;

(c) a DNA which has the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 3; and

(d) a DNA which is hybridizable with a DNA having the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 3 or a probe that can be produced from said nucleotide sequence under stringent conditions.

3. (Withdrawn) The DNA according to claim 1, which originates from a chromosome of a *Methylophilus* bacterium.

4. (Withdrawn) A methanol-utilizing bacterium, whereby the DNA according to claim 1 has been introduced, and said bacterium has improved ability to produce a polysaccharide.

5. (Withdrawn) The bacterium according to claim 4, which is a *Methylophilus* bacterium.

6. (Withdrawn) A method for producing a polysaccharide, comprising the steps of

A) culturing the bacterium according to claim 4 in a medium containing methanol as a major carbon source, allowing accumulation of the polysaccharide in the medium or in the bacterium, and

B) collecting the polysaccharide from the medium or the cells.

7. (Currently Amended) ~~A~~An isolated methanol-utilizing bacterium ~~having an ability to reduce production of~~with a reduced ability to produce a polysaccharide as compared with a wild-type strain, wherein a gene on ~~said~~the bacterium's chromosome ~~has the same nucleotide sequence as the DNA of claim 1, or which has homology to the DNA of claim 1 to such an extent that homologous recombination results in disruption of said DNA, thereby suppressing expression of the gene~~is disrupted so that expression of the gene is suppressed, wherein the gene is selected from the group consisting of:

(a) a DNA comprising the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1; and

(b) a DNA which is hybridizable with a DNA comprising the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1 under stringent conditions comprising 1 x SSC, 0.1% SDS at 60°C.

8. (Original) The bacterium according to claim 7, which is a *Methylophilus* bacterium.

9. (Withdrawn) A method for producing a target substance comprising the steps of

A) culturing the bacterium according to claim 7 which produces the target substance other than polysaccharide in a medium containing methanol as a major carbon source, allowing accumulation of the target substance in the medium or cells of the bacterium and

B) collecting the target substance from the medium or the cells.

10. (New) The bacterium according to claim 8, which is a *Methylophilus methylotrophus* bacterium.

11. (New) An isolated *Methylophilus* bacterium, wherein a gene on the bacterium's chromosome is disrupted so that expression of the gene is suppressed, wherein the gene comprises the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1.

12. (New) A method for producing a target substance comprising the steps of:

A) culturing the bacterium according to claim 8 which produces a target substance other than polysaccharide in a medium containing methanol as a major carbon source, allowing accumulation of the target substance in the medium or cells of the bacterium, and

B) collecting the target substance from the medium or the cells.

13. (New) A method for producing a target substance comprising the steps of:

A) culturing the bacterium according to claim 10 which produces a target substance other than polysaccharide in a medium containing methanol as a major carbon source, allowing accumulation of the target substance in the medium of cells of the bacterium, and

B) collecting the target substance from the medium or the cells.

14. (New) A method for producing a target substance comprising the steps of:

A) culturing the bacterium according to claim 11 which produces a target substance other than polysaccharide in a medium containing methanol as a major carbon source, allowing accumulation of the target substance in the medium or cells of the bacterium, and

B) collecting the target substance in the medium or the cells.

15. (New) The method according to claim 9, wherein said target substance is an amino acid.

16. (New) The method according to claim 12, wherein said target substance is an amino acid.

17. (New) The method according to claim 13, wherein said target substance is an amino acid.

18. (New) The method according to claim 14, wherein said target substance is an amino acid.